

## THE ORIGINAL FOUR

The 1999 navigation season has been a memorable one for many reasons. The weather in the Great Lakes area was superb for ship photographers, but it also was the hottest summer ever recorded in many areas (Toronto included), which brought great discomfort to many people. There was not much grain moving during the summer and many of the straight-deckers spent the summer at the wall. And more trouble for shippers was caused by extremely low lake water levels which not only played a part in several casualties but also forced ships to run at reduced drafts, thus reducing corporate incomes.

For the largest Canadian marine transportation company on the Great Lakes, the 1999 season started badly, with one of its bulk carriers suffering major grounding damage. However, on a far happier note, 1999 has been a year of celebration, as the Algoma Central Corporation observed the 100th anniversary of its founding. It was on August 11th, 1899, that by Special Act of Parliament, the Algoma Central Railway Company was incorporated at Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, with an authorized capital of three million dollars. The new company was an affiliate of the Ontario Lake Superior Company, one of the many enterprises of Francis Hector Clergue.

Clergue came to the Soo from his native State of Maine in 1894, and his original efforts in the north country were directed toward the development of electrical power in the Algoma District through the Tagona Water and Light Company. He later diversified his efforts, and in 1899 he incorporated the Consolidated Lake Superior Company, with capital of \$20 million. In 1901, he merged the Ontario Lake Superior Company with the Consolidated Lake Superior Company, and the resulting firm had a capital of \$117 million.

In 1898, iron ore was discovered in the Michipicoten area, northwest of the Soo, and the Helen Mine was opened to work this source of the valuable mineral. To move the iron ore from the Helen Mine to the port of Michipicoten on Lake Superior, from whence it could be shipped by water to the mills, Clergue formed the Algoma Central Railway Company, and its operations eventually would spread across the Algoma District, the name of the firm being changed in 1901 to The Algoma Central and Hudson Bay Railway Company.

Francis Clergue's transportation efforts were expanded from rail to water in 1900, when four ocean-going freighters were acquired and placed under the operation of what was called the Algoma Central Steamship Line. This is generally considered to have been the beginning of Algoma Central's marine operations, but that is not entirely the case. In fact, about 1896, Clergue's Lake Superior Power Company had acquired the wooden tug PHILADELPHIA (C.103694), (a) JESSIE, which was 90 x 19 x 15, 148 Gross and 88 Net Tons, and had been built at Stromness (now Dunnville), Ontario, in 1869, and which was rebuilt at the Soo in 1896. She was operated by the Algoma Central Steamship Line after its formation, and she remained with the fleet until she was wrecked at Gros Cap on October 3rd, 1907.

The four salt-water steamers brought to the lakes in 1900 by Algoma Central, the LEAFIELD, MONKSHAVEN, THEANO and PALIKI, were the first freight carriers in the fleet, but the company also acquired the passenger steamers OSSIFRAGE (C.107488, formerly U.S.155124) and MINNIE M. (C.107889, formerly U.S.91764) that same year, and thereafter chartered and/or purchased a wide variety of vessels. The first ship built especially for Algoma Central was the 379-foot barge AGAWA (I) (C.111867), which was constructed in 1902 at Collingwood.

Before we delve into the details of the histories of LEAFIELD, MONKSHAVEN, THEANO and PALIKI, we should tell a bit more about the history of the company, so that those details do not interfere with the ships' tales. Much of the capital for Francis Clergue's various enterprises was supplied by New York and Philadelphia financiers who were interested in the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, the Pennsylvania and Northwestern Railroad, and the Berwind-White Coal Mining Company. Needless to say, the United States Steel Corpora-